

In the Abstract:

Please insert the following Abstract after the Claims:

Abstract of the Invention

The invention is a process for producing pitches, in particular those suitable for use as carbon precursors, from coal tars and distillates thereof, through a sequential and combined operation in three steps: 1. Reaction: Oxidative thermal treatment under mild conditions of pressure and temperature ($<400^{\circ}\text{C}$, $<10\text{ bar g}$, residence time in the range of 2-10 seconds, and preferably $350\text{-}400^{\circ}\text{C}$, $5\text{-}10\text{ bar g}$, 6-10 seconds), using air, oxygen, low-oxygen air or mixtures thereof as reagents; 2. Thermal treatment under inert atmosphere ($340\text{-}400^{\circ}\text{C}$, $<10\text{ bar g}$, residence time in the range of 3-10 hours, and preferably $370\text{-}400^{\circ}\text{C}$, atmospheric pressure, 4-6 hours) for stabilization of the reaction product; and 3. Fractional distillation (preferably in vacuum or by stripping with steam or inert gas) in order to adjust, according to the desired application, the softening point of the pitch or carbonaceous precursor.